



When considering small-scale architecture, whether a private home, gallery, small library or even a classroom, we tend to notice things like the placement and quality of light, the way a room extends into an outdoor area, the lure of a bench built in to a bay window. Our attention automatically focuses on the elements that improve the experience of being within the space. Yet, when we assess architecture on an urban scale, we primarily ponder externals: the skyline, the shapes and silhouettes of the buildings, the façade materials and graphic composition or other physical attributes of the overall mass. Somehow, with the increase in magnitude, we lose the intimacy of relationship to the space, thereby neglecting the very elements that remain central to our wellbeing.

Nature, even in small doses, is becoming a rarified amenity not only in our ever expanding city, but in urban centers around the world. With the explosively escalating price of land and the logistical necessity to build progressively taller buildings, this critically important requirement has all but disappeared from the current urban landscape. It is vital, not only to the long term sustainability of cities but to the human beings that inhabit them, to ameliorate what we are willing to accept as the inexorable sacrifices of urban life.

In the rich connections once played out daily on stoops and sidewalks, between neighbors and passersby, there was a vibrancy and interdependence. Not only between people, but amid the buildings within a given streetscape, a sense of community in which we all played our part. Along the way, we surrendered to the vertical sprawl by sacrificing the very things that sustain us. We began building sealed glass towers, living in increasing isolation, from each other and from the street and neighborhoods around us. From these sleek podiums, we grew progressively disconnected not only from the communities in which we live, but from the natural world receding beyond the sprawl. As a result, we find ourselves living in cities where direct access to a sizable well-designed outdoor space has become a luxury experience limited to extremely few. Located primarily on rooftops, there exists a rarified natural world invisible to the streetscape below.

It is within our power to begin right now, today, by designing permeable buildings and expansive outdoor spaces which will return the emphasis to its rightful place, the human beings that will live within them. We need to rediscover and celebrate the joys of urban living rather than simply committing to endure them.